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Testimony of  
Natasha M. Pierre, JD, MSW  
Policy & Legislative Director  
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women  
Before the  
Labor and Public Employees Committee  
March 1, 2012

RE: S.B. 150, AAC Family and Medical Leave Benefits for Certain Municipal Employees.

Senators Prague and Guglielmo, Representatives Zalaski and Rigby, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) regarding S.B. 150, AAC Family and Medical Leave Benefits for Certain Municipal Employees.

S.B. 150 would grant paraprofessionals the right to family and medical leave. Passage of this bill would benefit paraprofessionals who work in public elementary and secondary schools.

*CT Specific Data*

- Families incur income losses ranging from over \$300 to more than \$3,500 per year due to lost wages from the wage-earner's own illnesses.<sup>1</sup>
- Families incur losses ranging from \$800 to \$6,900 per year due to lost wages during a family illness.<sup>2</sup>

Policies to support workers as they provide care for family members or take care of their own health are essential for a strong Connecticut workforce. Nearly 40% of workers are not eligible under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) because they work for businesses with fewer than 50 employees, or their hours are restricted in such a way that the employee never meets the FMLA threshold.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the occupations that continue to deny FMLA benefits to its employees are occupations that are female dominated, such as the paraprofessionals addressed in this bill.

According to the paraprofessional's union, United Electrical Union Local 22, paraprofessionals work 6.25 hours a day (1,125 a school year), rather than the required 1,250 hours needed to be eligible for FMLA. Paraprofessionals are not allowed to work more than 6.25 hours a day, and therefore should not be penalized for

<sup>1</sup> Women's Union. *The Real Cost of Living and Getting Health Care in Connecticut: The Health Economic Sufficiency Standard*. Prepared for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and the Foundation for Connecticut Women, February 2006.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

it. Passage of this bill would assist families to care for themselves and family members when they are ill, and add some protection against loss of income.

Working women of the “sandwich” generation<sup>ii</sup>- those with both minor children and aging parents- are especially vulnerable to needing to take time off from work to care for a family member. Women represent more than two-thirds of adults providing substantial assistance to elderly parents;<sup>iii</sup> provide an annual average of \$1,521 in financial support to elderly parents; and spend 23 hours a week (1,210 hours a year), on average, providing care to elderly parents.<sup>iv</sup>

We appreciate your continued attention to this matter, and look forward to working with you on this important issue.

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<sup>i</sup>National Partnership for Women and Families. *Families Matter*, 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> ABC News: Sandwich Generation Faces Masses Stress in Caring for Aging Parents and Kids. March 2008. <  
<http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Parenting/story?id=4487229>>

<sup>iii</sup> Richard W. Johnson and Joshua M. Wiener, “A Profile of Frail Older Americans and Their Caregivers,” Urban Institute, The Retirement Project Occasional Paper Number 8, February 2006 Table

<sup>iv</sup> Charles R. Pierret, “The ‘sandwich generation’: women caring for parents and children,” *Monthly Labor Review*, September 2006, Table 2.